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Respacing for Peace? Experiments with Integration and the Ontopolitics of Rural Planning in Post-War Burundi

Andrea Purdekova

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the politics and social impact of post-war ‘respacing for peace’ strategies in Burundi from within a set of contested spatial arrangements—post-war socio-spatial experiments properly speaking—including peace villages, IDP site clearances, and land sharing. The paper takes a critical look at these reconfigurations, and the resistances and manipulations that result when people (or their remains) are moved or placed in the name of coexistence, integration and sharing after the war. In this way, the paper contributes to post-conflict planning literature that is mostly concerned with overcoming segregation and cleansing through integration by exploring some of the complexities and problems that can arise with unquestioned embrace of the latter. The paper shows that a very particular and problematic logic of ethnic coexistence and physical integration drives post-war respacing in Burundi and that people resist it with strategies in both physical and reflexive space. Proceeding through a set of paradoxes — refusal to return and staying put, or re-emigration as a response to settling — the article explores how and why respacing-for-peace might produce, or fail to prevent, the opposite outcome: community conflict, social tension and segregation.

[first, unnumbered footnote]

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INTRODUCTION: PEACE-BUILDING THROUGH SOCIO-SPATIAL EXPERIMENTS

‘Peace villages express the idea that unity, coexistence between people from different backgrounds is materialized’ (The Permanent Secretary, Ministry for Communal Development, Bujumbura, April 2015)

How have post-conflict governments deployed spatial planning for purposes of peace building and to what effect? Have socio-spatial experiments with ‘integration’ worked in divided societies? Overall, and especially in the African context, the nature and effects of states’ post-war experimentation with space,¹ specifically spatial placement and arrangements intended to diffuse conflict and promote peace and coexistence, are little understood. In extant literature, placement and displacement feature predominantly as responses to violent conflict or its causatives rather than as tools deployed by state planners in building peace. The literature on post-conflict reconfigurations of rural space and dwelling, on the other hand, focuses predominantly on the economic rather than social aspects and prospects of re-engineering and reconstruction (see Ansoms, 2008, 2009). Strands of literature in political geography look at post-conflict issues of contested territoriality, fractured sovereignty (Heathershaw and Lambach, 2008), hybrid political orders (Boege et al., 2008), the governance of divided cities and spaces (Bollens, 2007, 2008) and ethnic segregation resulting from war-time violence (Phuong, 2000; Toal and Dahlman, 2011; Tuathail and Dahlman, 2004; Tuathail and O’Loughlin, 2009). Much less is known about situations where integration is already at work, about the logics and the actual ‘social production’ of such respacing. The lacunae in knowledge are especially pronounced when it comes to perspectives from below and from within these newly constructed spaces.

¹ ‘Space’ has a specific meaning here, and differs from ‘place’ or ‘location’. Data are gathered in specific locations, which are also lived ‘places’ constructed through mutual interaction of people, physical landscape, and their experiences and representations of both. ‘Space’ allows us to combine reflexive and physical analyses — specific ‘types’ of space are targeted for intervention, remodelling or (re)construction. Ontologies of space and ‘ontopolitics’, as will be shown here, do not only concern state planners. People themselves use principles underpinning respacing to assert their interests.

This article contributes to wider debates on spatial planning ('respacing') in conflict-affected societies. The key preoccupation in the literature is how to manage and possibly reverse ethnic cleansing and social segregation effected by war, through experimentation in spatial governance and design or encouragement of return with the overall objective of sharing and integration (Phuong, 2000; Toal and Dahlman, 2011; Tuathail and Dahlman, 2004; Tuathail and O'Loughlin, 2009). This study aims to extend these debates in three important ways.

First, the available critical planning literature is still largely state- and governance-centric (Bollens, 2008; Scott, 1998), offering little by way of local experience and response to integrative spatial planning post-war (for an exception see Van Damme et al., 2014). This article combines both perspectives but foregrounds the latter, emphasizing people's interaction with post-conflict planning. Specifically, it elaborates and applies a perspective of 'ontopolitics' explored in further detail in the conceptual framework below.

Second, the literature typically grapples with cleansing and segregation and ways of moderating or reversing these trends, often through spatial integration. Former Yugoslavia is a case in point. The war there resulted in ethnic cleansing and ethnic homogenization² of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina, often further strengthened by post-war local authorities, and only weakly counteracted by international actors through programmes such as 'Open Cities' promoting 'minority returns' and an 'ethnically mixed' territory (Black, 2002; Phuong, 2000). While some works critique the narrow 'ethnic frame' to integration which obscures other sources of social tension (Black, 2002), they tell us little about people's perspectives and interaction with such programmes and concepts. This study pushes the discussion further by critically investigating what integration means and is, in the concrete setting of a

² Both the terms 'ethnic cleansing' and 'ethnic homogenization' should be handled with care as they tend to be reifying and detract from underlying political causes of conflict. The way in which ethnicity shaped movement in the case of Burundi — the focus of this article — was particular and not necessarily the result of active 'cleansing' even though it did take on an ethnic character: most refugees flowing across borders were Hutu, whereas the Tutsi tended to stay inside the country in IDP camps. In contrast to former Yugoslavia, the territory of Burundi was not ethnically homogenized/compartimentalized as a result of the war. Given this contrast, it is intriguing to assess the nature and impact of the distinctly ethnic lens adopted by the Burundian government with regard to social integration post-war.

divided society, and why and how a seemingly beneficent planning might have unintended consequences or might be resisted from below. Like Oren Yiftachel (1998), I encounter the ‘dark sides’ or ‘undersides’ of public production of (in this case post-war) space and its involvement in the (re)construction or remodelling of collective identities. In an extension of Yiftachel, I take a closer look within these spaces themselves; through people’s narratives, orientations and actions, I explore the diverse ‘undersides’ of planning as understood or imagined by individuals, and which reach beyond simply social control. As the study will show, the very terms and languages deployed by planners are being contested on the ground, and with them the assumptions that underlie integration.

Finally, there is very little research available in the African context, despite the fact that it contains important case studies of conflict-affected and deeply divided societies in which these questions are especially pertinent. Burundi and Rwanda are key African cases of intimate, community-based violence where the ‘integration from below’ debates matter acutely. These two neighbouring countries share certain commonalities. In contrast to former Yugoslavia, the territories of Rwanda and Burundi have not been ethnically segregated and separately governed, and ‘mixing’ has been encouraged or engineered purposefully. Just as they did before the war, people once again live in intimate proximity across ethnic lines, although the nature and form of integration is not without contestation (as will be explored here). Both governments have embarked on seemingly similar measures of post-war villagization and land sharing. There are nonetheless important differences: Rwanda is the epitome of a re-engineering state, working to transform most aspects of society and the economy (Straus and Waldorf, 2011). Unlike Burundi, its most visible spatial intervention — that of rural land reform (see Ansoms, 2008, 2009; Van Damme et al., 2014) — is driven by concerns about productivity rather than social goals of sharing and integration. A more fruitful area for comparison perhaps lies with Rwanda’s socio-spatial experimentation with mass camping retreats — the *ingando* and *itorero* programmes — which directly combine the spatial and the social in attempts at social integration (Purdeková, 2011, 2015).

Immediately after the 1994 genocide, Rwanda embarked on an ambitious villagization project called *imidugudu*. Although the *imidugudu* project has attracted academic

attention (Hilhorst and van Leeuwen, 1999; Issakson, 2013; van Leeuwen, 2001), a close study of the literature suggests that (1) there is as yet no integrative look at resourcing in Rwanda, and (2) that there has been no attempt to marry and measure the spatial and social by looking within the ‘new’ spaces themselves. Burundi’s officials strongly object to the suggestion that the earlier introduction of *imidugudu* in Rwanda served as the inspiration for Burundi’s own peace village programme. Instead, they argue that the latter connects to a long history of villagization inside Burundi, going back to President Bagaza’s Republic in the late 1970s/1980s and even prior to this, to late colonial villagization projects in the 1950s (Laely, 2015). The proposed scale and intended purpose of contemporary villagization in Burundi is, however, unprecedented.

Burundi offers a key contemporary case study of resourcing for peace. Faced with mass inflows of Hutu from exile, and retrenchment of Tutsi in sites for internally displaced persons (IDP) since the end of the civil war in 2003, the government has embarked on a variety of resourcing strategies to deal with these challenges. The underlying logic of resourcing is one of ‘coexistence’, conceived of as inter-ethnic mixing, sharing and physical integration. ‘Peace village’ projects (also known as Rural Integrated Villages, Villages Ruraux Intégrés, or VRIs) have been constructed on government-owned land over three phases since 2000. The first two phases saw more than 25 villages constructed jointly by the government — the Ministry of National Solidarity in partnership with PARESI³ — with financial and logistical help from donors, principally a variety of UN agencies.⁴ They catered mostly to the needs of Hutu returnees ‘without address’ (unable to claim ancestral land) but explicitly mixed all three ethnicities.

The latest phase of villagization commenced in 2011 under the initiative of the President himself and with the Ministry of Communal Development as the key coordinating body. This phase is by far the most ambitious, with 120 villages to be

³ Le Projet d’Appui au Repatriement et à la Réintégration des Sinistrés (Project in Support of War Victim Repatriation and Reintegration).

⁴ Phase II saw an increase in the number of stakeholders both on the side of government and donors. Half a dozen UN agencies (including UNDP, UNHCR and FAO) plus GTZ, DANIDA and African Habitat fund were involved, and the same number of government agencies; for more details, see Falisse and Nyionkuru (2015).

completed by the end of 2015, one in every commune of Burundi. At the time of my last fieldwork, construction on the majority of villages had either commenced or been completed. The scope reflects the project's broader developmental and transformatory aim — it is tied to the Burundi 2025 development framework and targets all rural Burundians living in dispersed settlements on the hills. Despite its wider appeals to the benefits of concentrated settlement,⁵ it is noteworthy that discursively the latest phase of villagization is tied firmly to its predecessors. The new villages are not only referred to as 'peace villages', but there is an explicit accent on inter-ethnic mixing and '*cohésion sociale*' (The Government of Burundi 2012). The Gishubi commune administrator, holding an award for constructing the largest village in Burundi, emphasizes that 'people live in the village without distinction on the grounds of race or ethnicity', which helps 'eliminate bad past behaviour in an effort towards peacebuilding'.⁶ All of these villagization attempts show clear continuities in rescaling logic centred around inter-ethnic habitation and social integration as ideals, with frequent mentions in the official discourse of creating a 'normal' or 'model' Burundi village. These villages are constructed 'in the same spirit [as the original peace villages] because they have to include all ethnic groups'.⁷ It is interesting to note that, despite the long pedigree of villagization attempts in Burundi, the image of a 'model' Burundi village based on 'integration' is largely a fantasy, as both historically and currently the dominant form of settlement in the country is dispersed rather than concentrated dwelling.

However, rescaling attempts at integration and coexistence do not stop with villagization. Almost 120 IDP sites⁸ with 80,000 inhabitants (predominantly Tutsi) still linger on. The number of sites and IDPs has seen only a modest decrease over the past decade.⁹ The Ministry of National Solidarity is the organ responsible for finding 'durable solutions' for the IDPs, whether this be return or recognition of their

⁵ Two benefits in particular are highlighted: access to services, and alleviation of land pressure.

⁶ Interview, Gishubi commune, 21 April 2015.

⁷ Interview with the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Communal Development, Bujumbura, 10 April 2015.

⁸ Known informally as *les sites*, a shortened version of *les sites de déplacés* (displacement sites).

⁹ The last comprehensive IDP survey conducted by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in 2005 suggested that 117,000 IDPs lived in settlements at that time (cited in IDMC, 2011: 7).

settlement (GoB, 2009). In practice, the government — through local administrators and police — has attempted a variety of strategies (not always successful) for the clearance/dispersal of the sites. Integration is one of the key reasons given for this: ‘It is not good to isolate themselves over there [at the Bugendana site]. The philosophy is to mix people, both ethnicities’.¹⁰

Meanwhile, land sharing has become a de facto solution for most of the half million Hutu returnees who came back to find their lands occupied. The main body mediating and arbitrating land disputes between returnees and residents has been the 2006 National Land Commission (CNTB). Burundians have been asked to ‘share’ space in the name of peaceful coexistence, with land typically divided 50/50 between the parties. Rather than resolution, this has led to suppression of conflict and a simmering disquiet.

The Burundi case thus has the potential to teach us about the ways in which narratives of coexistence and peace have driven socio-spatial re-engineering, as well as illuminating the results of, and resistances to, this form of integration. But how do we conceptualize the way in which these different initiatives from concentration in villages to dispersal from IDP sites are linked? After all, they are not the result of a single policy contained in one core document, and they involve a range of ministries. My research suggests that they are nonetheless tied together through the same discourse or planning rationality. Viewing these activities separately obscures this overarching conceptual plane and precludes a more integrative and political analysis. The few existing studies of new post-war spaces operate at this more piecemeal level, excising one spatial form such as villagization from a wider set of strategies. An integrative approach to the policies is thus an important contribution of this article.

Although the initiatives studied here were introduced at different times¹¹ and overseen by separate ministries, there is a common discourse or planning imaginary tying them

¹⁰ Interview with the Social Advisor to the Administrator of Bugendana commune, 22 July 2013.

¹¹ The activities discussed here were introduced within a relatively narrow time window of less than 10 years, between the 2003 peace agreement and the inception of the latest phase of villagization in 2011. In the course of this time, the continuity in government of the CNDD-FDD allowed for increasing dominance and capture of political space.

together — a unified ‘reflexive space’,¹² a recognizable way of seeing and conceptualizing the needs of post-conflict rescaling.¹³ The rationality values ‘social integration’ and imagines it as ‘inter-ethnic’; it focuses primarily on physical ‘placing’ of people together. This is not to say that integration is the sole or even primary driver of these projects;¹⁴ and the clash of stated versus underlying but unstated political imperatives will be explored here as well.

This study aims to make contributions that reach beyond planning itself. First, we need a greater understanding of how peace and post-war transition are conceived, lived and judged by the people affected, both in general, and rather urgently in the case of Burundi. Wilmer (1998: 105) criticized key-actor orientated and top-down conceptions of war, conflict and conflict resolution, calling for an ‘ordinary’ people-centred view. But a decade later, Heathershaw and Lambach (2008) found, in their review of the field, that ‘ethnographic perspectives on post-conflict change are [still] notably lacking [and] the subject of the post-conflict space remains under-theorised and over-generalised’. The analysis here hopes to contribute to filling this gap. Problematizing the very term ‘from below’, the analysis here instead looks through a set of concrete spaces which, although ‘local’ and ‘rural’¹⁵ and at times remote from the political centre, are all very much connected to the state in discourse, imagination and practice. The narratives on being placed and displaced in the name of coexistence

¹² This concept is key; it can be defined as ‘thinking about the meta-theoretical assumptions and the role of different knowledge orders in the production here of post-conflict space’ (Engel and Nugent, 2010: 5).

¹³ We might ask how closely the planners can identify with the predicament of those in IDP sites or peace villages. While government functionaries might themselves be returnees from exile, and in fewer cases might have experience of internal displacement, they are now all educated, urban-based elites restructuring the rural landscape. Hence there are limits on the planners sharing the lived experience of the spaces they help re-engineer.

¹⁴ The early peace villages were an emergency reintegration measure that combined developmental and social rationales. The latest villagization attempt is a longer-term developmental measure that also incorporates varieties of integration. In this article, the lens of ‘social integration’ is foregrounded, in order to explore a range of post-war places (where people are quite literally ‘coming together’ to share the same space) to examine what they look like and their impact on social relations and narratives on the post-war political dispensation.

¹⁵ The vast majority of Burundi’s inhabitants live in rural areas: only 10 per cent of Burundians live in urban areas. While the spaces discussed here, such as peace villages and former displacement sites, represent ‘concentrated settlement’ rather than the dispersed settlement typical of Burundi, most of them are still firmly located in rural rather than urban or peri-urban contexts.

and integration offer a useful insight into state–society relations, and serve as a way to ‘spatialize’ the post-war social contract and the production and management of grievances.

Second, the article hopes to fill an important gap in our understanding of the local drivers of conflict in Burundi, and how and why state development itself might fit into the equation. Burundi’s 2015 electoral crisis captured the attention of the world, but was almost exclusively interpreted through the lens of urban protest and the state repression of civil society and the opposition: there was silence about the rural, the local and the structural drivers of conflict. By focusing on placement and displacement and the socio-spatial refashioning after war, this study hopes to show that ‘peace’ and ‘transition’ were in question long before the early months of 2015. It also aims to complement the dominant macro frame of studying peace building in Burundi through institutions such as power sharing, peacekeeping or identity politics (Curtis, 2013; Daley, 2006; Lemarchand, 2007; Vandeginste, 2011, 2014). Existing political ethnography, on the other hand, deals almost exclusively with issues of transitional justice rather than evolving grievances (for important works in this tradition see Ingelaere, 2009; Ingelaere and Kohlhagen, 2012; Uvin and Nee, 2009; Vandeginste, 2012). As will be shown, people’s fears and aspirations related to the state’s respacing strategies challenge the notion of a society ‘at peace’ and question the presence of a systemic rupture with the past that is the very precondition for transitional justice.

This study ties together the different ‘socio-spatial’ experiments in post-war Burundi — peace villages, IDP site removal and land-sharing — under a common respacing logic of coexistence, as three indices on a broader grid, and demonstrates the inconsistencies in the logic and the resistances that occur in response, both in reflexive and physical space. By examining a set of paradoxes tied to placement in/out of these contested arrangements — the spaces of ‘peace’ that breed conflict, the refusal to return ‘home’ and the staking of claims to stay put, or re-emigration as a response to settling — the article hopes to show and explain why peace making through space making might result in (or fail to prevent) the very opposite: conflict, tension and segregation.

The narrow ‘ethnic lens’ that is applied to the re-engineering of space obscures other sources of tension and conflict in Burundi, including those related to the spatial project itself. But those affected appropriate discourses of ‘coexistence’ to resist respacing and stake out their claims vis-à-vis space, in a mutual play with vocabularies of desired change. Ultimately, distrust is produced as people unveil the political underpinnings of re-spacing projects, which are on the surface socially motivated. The lens of dynamic space is a useful diagnostic not only of state–society relations and the prevailing (dis)trust towards the post-conflict political dispensation, but also of local drivers of conflict, which are intimately tied to state-led development and political governance as these trigger spatial strategies.

The article considers a range of spatial forms and very different communities of experience (Hutu and Tutsi, returnees, IDPs and more) in order to demonstrate that the politics of spatial re-organization after war touches Burundians across social divides, and to highlight common themes related to power and the state of transition. It is based on fieldwork carried out between 2013 and 2015, principally in the provinces of Bururi, Makamba, Gitega and Bujumbura Rural, with shorter visits to Cibitoke, Bubanza and some fieldwork in the capital Bujumbura. These provinces were selected because they contain some of the greatest concentrations of former IDP sites, villagization projects and land-sharing arrangements.

The methodology underlying the study is qualitative and ethnographic and combines a number of data-gathering techniques. In addition to over 110 semi-structured interviews¹⁶ with rural Burundians, the study draws on a number of focus groups, debates and observation sourced from numerous visits to peace villages,¹⁷ integrated village projects,¹⁸ former IDP sites¹⁹ and scattered settlements in the provinces of Makamba and Bujumbura Rural. Most interviews in rural areas were conducted in the local language (Kirundi) and translated by a Burundian research assistant.²⁰ The

¹⁶ Participants were chosen through random selection and snowball sampling.

¹⁷ Fieldwork was conducted in three peace villages around Rumonge: Mutambara, Busebwa and Buzimba. Additional data were gathered in two peace villages in Bubanza.

¹⁸ These include Makaba, Gishubi and Kagwema.

¹⁹ Data were gathered in three IDP sites in Bugendana, Mwaro Ngundu and Ryanonyi.

²⁰ The RA was a lecturer at the University of Burundi; the gender and ethnic background of the RA did not seem to affect the willingness of people to participate and/or open up on the

longer-term scope of the project allowed repeat visits to a number of sites and follow-up interviews with some of the key participants.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The article investigates how the spatial and social interlock after conflict. The term ‘socio-spatial experiments’ is purposefully chosen here to reflect that, in the minds of planners, spatial reconfiguration is meant to be socially transformative in its own right. Inspired by the recent ‘spatial turn’ (Engel and Nugent, 2010), I move away from the lens of post-conflict states to post-conflict spaces instead. While the former was useful as a programmatic call to study post-war development and reconstruction, much remains wanting by way of theory and conceptual elaboration. Available studies tend to treat space as a backdrop or a stage on which social action or planning happen rather than an analytic frame in its own right, and offer only static readings of space. Yet dynamic readings of space — the orientations, dispositions, fears and aspirations attached to leaving or staying in particular spaces — can offer a useful diagnostic of another dynamic process— the post-war ‘transition’ to peace. I therefore hope to show how space can feature centrally in our study of post-war transition and state–society relations, and how this creates potential to ‘think anew’ on key debates in development such as planning, political geography and forced migration.

The overall frame of this work is the politics of space and re-ordering. More specifically, I am interested in uncovering the ‘ontopolitics’ at play, here defined as struggles over the power to posit order, name its constituent parts, their nature and relations.²¹ Post-war states are an excellent arena to observe such struggles unfold. They allow us to examine how people are placed in relation to both space and each other, the underlying logics, and the effects and resistances that are triggered in both physical and reflexive space. Ontopolitics is the (often subtle) struggle that ensues on

subject under study, further supporting the contention that many of the key issues in Burundi (including those studied here) now reach beyond ethnicity.

²¹ The ‘onto’ in ontopolitics broadly ties to the branch of philosophy known as ontology and its accent on understanding the nature of being and becoming, as well as the basic categories/entities and their relations. Here this is translated to understanding the *contested and dynamic* production of a new socio-spatial order, the struggle over naming its key parts and relations.

the ground over the terms and practices of restructuring the post-conflict space. This encompasses the ways in which people act within the new spaces, asserting their interests not only by manoeuvring in physical space, but by appropriating the very logics and languages that drive these initiatives.

The focus on ‘respacing’ and attendant (dis)placement also foregrounds relational and dynamic aspects of social action, in particular: (1) the actual interplay and struggle over defining what a ‘post-conflict’ space is about, and how it should be achieved; (2) concrete struggles over placement and displacement in physical space; and (3) the generation of narratives and strategies vis-à-vis the state and its developmental objectives. This latter aspect includes such elements as trust in the post-war political dispensation, the ‘new’ social contract, and perceptions of ‘stability’ and security. The state of transition, in other words, is best grasped through specific spaces in transition — placement into villages, dispersal from *les sites* and placement into ‘sharing’ arrangements.

With respect to political geography, the analysis does not revolve around the ways in which power maps onto spatial *arrangements*; it considers but reaches beyond concepts such as ‘the new spatial order’ (Howard, 2005: 105), ‘movement-space’ (Merriman, 2012) or geographies of mobility fitted with mappings of channels, networks, stops and routes. The spatial order of course matters in profound ways — Burundi is an extremely poor, rural-based and land-scarce setting, factors which together contribute to the high stakes of respacing and its potential to spark conflict and resistance. A long history of state-instigated violence carries with it memories and distrust that equally contribute to this volatility. The aim here is to take this structural analysis and push it further to the agentive domain, to investigate the dynamic and interactive aspect of political geography, the ways in which people negotiate power through movement or its rejection. I want to foreground the ways in which state–society relations can be read off actions, orientations, aspirations and affective states generated in response to or in defiance of official attempts to place, arrange, fill or remove. Inspired by Lubkeman’s (2008) inventive expansion of migration debates to ‘involuntary immobility’, the paper reaches beyond movement to spatial strategies such as staying put.

But we need even sharper analytical tools, and it is here that I introduce the concepts of orientation and compensation. Academic debates have long recognized that space is socially constructed, and later that it is mutually construed between physical, social and representational realms. The socio-materiality approach (see Brad, 2009) granting agency to objects and physical settings in generating social dynamics has been inspiring; but for our purposes, it can be usefully expanded. I do not investigate the social outcomes of the interaction between people and static build-up (or physical landscape). The post-war (dis)placement studied here layers movement upon movement (e.g. the internally displaced to be placed again); it is about social production that results from acts such as being removed, deciding to leave, or staking claims to stay. For those affected, it is about mental suspension between options and orientation among them, it is about arrangements and coordinates vis-à-vis others elsewhere. In people's narratives explaining their 'position' there is always a reference to other arrangements, whether experienced or merely intimated — e.g. *sites* versus the hills (*mitumba*) versus integrated villages (*bigwati*); peace villages versus refugee settlements.

It is this key aspect of orientations that motivates people's action and that typical analyses of a single 'type' of space or place cannot capture. People also work with 'compensations' rather than potentialities (an open iteration): the concrete alternatives of placement within the post-conflict spatial order. What is thus produced is 'relative space' — one option against others, staying put as against 'not going there'. But people orient themselves and manoeuvre not only in physical spaces (as experienced and/or imagined), but also in reflexive space. The latter denotes 'thinking about the meta-theoretical assumptions and the role of different knowledge orders in the production of [here post-conflict] space' (Engel and Nugent, 2010: 5). Crucially, this study shows that it is not only planners (whether in the government or aid agencies) who interact in reflexive space, but that those on the ground themselves appropriate meta-discourses of 'integration', 'peace' and 'coexistence' to stake out claims vis-à-vis physical space.

If orientations (among placements) are a synchronic concept, layering (of movement upon movement) is a diachronic one. Here, the meta-concepts underlying (dis)placement have changed. During the civil war, the key idea underlying

government action was ‘separation’ — regroupment camps were created for masses of the Hutu to separate them from the combatants, and IDP camps were created for the Tutsi (Ndikumana, 2000; Stamnes and Wyn Jones, 2000). After the war, the concept put to action was ‘integration’. What joins both eras is the ethnic principle that structures (dis)placement. This principle needs to be politicized and subjected to critical scrutiny.

The literature on migration, and specifically forced migration, misses such historical layering and interconnections; it fails to analyse reflexive space for ‘motivating’ ideas (and thus fails to capture ‘ontopolitics’, the struggle over ideas and concepts underpinning respacing), and misses the specific type of placement dynamics discussed here. Forced movement is still overwhelmingly associated with conflict and breakdown of the political order and the state–citizen link. During peace, analysis concentrates on displacement in the name of large development projects such as dams or urbanization, or on the problematic notion of ‘return’ and reintegration, the latter still largely sidestepping non-economic and political aspects (see Bradley, 2014; Long, 2008; Vorrath, 2008 for a critique).

In this article, I depart from these dominant foci and look squarely at ‘peace governance’, at uses of (dis)placement to, at least ostensibly, state-build and peace-build, to re-imagine a political order, to integrate rather than separate, include rather than exclude. Rather than the notion of return (with its assumptions of equilibration and exilic bias), I prefer the lens of ‘coming together’ (foregrounding Mannheim’s 1952 notion of ‘fresh contact’, here coming together both as social and political community). Such an approach also shifts attention away from the dominant focus on state weakness²² to state ‘experimentation’ properly speaking (even if drawing on wider and past ‘repertoires’ of action; see Tarrow, 1998). Rather than focusing on effectiveness (meeting stated goals), this approach leads us to interrogate ‘productiveness’ — the actual social production of the new respacing attempts.

²² In conflict-affected countries generally, and African countries more specifically.

ANALYSIS AND PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

Settling or Unsettling? Peace Villages as Conflicted Spaces

The following section focuses on ‘peace village’ projects (*bigwati vy’amahoro*) and contrasts the official aims of this ‘placement’ with the observed effects. It draws on the concepts of layering and orientations to understand the dynamic social production within these settlements. Specifically, it considers the space through its past uses (‘layering’) as well as people’s relations to and narratives of spaces adjacent, outside and elsewhere (‘orientations’) in order to show how these together determine the ontopolitical play — the struggles over space both physical and reflexive. On the reflexive plane, inhabitants of peace villages question the core assumptions underlying the project: that ‘peace’ has indeed been established and that ‘ethnicity’ lies at the root of conflict, or peace.

The peace village sites began to be constructed soon after the 2000 Arusha Peace accords under the leadership of the First Vice President Frederic Bamvuginyumvira. They revolved around the idea of ‘mixing’ ethnicities and people from across the civil war divide; they were constructed to accommodate returnees ‘without address’²³ (mostly Hutu) and other ‘vulnerable’ Burundians, often IDPs (mostly Tutsi). The evidence presented here suggests that rather than being spaces of ‘settling’, these are spaces of ‘unsettling’ on a number of levels: displacing some people just as they ‘place’ others, causing conflict instead of consolidating peace, and becoming spaces of outmigration. In the words of a peace village *nyumbakumi*,²⁴ ‘the idea was of reconciliation, returnees could live together with residents, and all would feel Burundian. It worked for a while but afterwards a problem [occurred] and the system failed’.

²³ Also referred to as ‘sans reference’, this category comprised circa 10,000 returnees who could not locate their ancestral lands.

²⁴ *Nyumbakumi* typically (historically) refers to the lowest level of administration, an authority responsible for 10 houses. In this case, it referred simply to an informal ‘person of authority’ overseeing a portion of the village (in this case 26 houses). The term and system originate from Tanzania but have been applied more widely in the region, including in Rwanda.

Research on Burundi's peace villages is still scant, and the few recently published research articles (Falisse and Niyonkuru, 2015; Fransen and Kuschminder, 2014; also see a brief report by Ninderetse, 2010) focus on implementation failure, on the villages' inability to create effective livelihoods through what is essentially a 'reversed' development logic. The existing research, however, does not delve into issues of integration and coexistence, conflict and reconciliation, people's relation to the new space and spatial strategies of resistance.

Peace villages in post-war Burundi were not only meant to 'trigger development' but also to 'reconcile communities' (Falisse and Niyonkuru, 2015: 2, citing government report; also Basutama, 2010), as 'experiments in coexistence' (Baddorf, 2010); it is hence key to analyse them from this angle. The notion of reconciliation is highlighted in government documents and the press but it is conceptualized purely as 'cross-ethnic', among Burundi's three ethnic groups (Hutu, Tutsi and Twa). Moreover the practice is superficial, consisting literally of placing the three groups together in the space of the village or community. In the process, the key questions remain unanswered: what sort of coexistence is being promoted when the exercise is seen beyond its ethnic lens? Do peace villages promote peace? The first paradox of post-war placement is that peace villages are layering conflict, tension and separation, first, within the space of the village, second, between villagers and outside communities, and, third, even between integrated villages themselves.

The first wave of post-war villages were hastily constructed with substantial donor support and emphasized 'cross-ethnic' habitation. Despite the label 'peace villages', there are no special activities fostering interaction or reconciliation aimed at dissolving or transforming ethnic relations within the space of the village. What seems to happen instead is that residents come to share common preoccupations, regardless of ethnicity.²⁵ People in all villages were quick to assure me that, in general, ethnic relations (often couched in terms of 'returnees' and 'residents' —

²⁵ People from different ethnic groups are simply placed together in the same space. Hence Falisse and Niyonkuru (2015) suggest that 'peace village' is a misnomer. Nonetheless, it is still important to observe what sort of 'social production' emerges, at or beyond the level of ethnicity. Baddorf's (2010) findings echo my own, namely that people across ethnicities come to face similar problems, and often attribute these to the government, including manipulations of ethnicity 'to get power': 'The government has provided little help, regardless of ethnicity' (ibid.).

abasangwa) are good: ‘we are living in good relations’, ‘we are sharing everything [*turahana akunyu* — we share little salt], we trust each other’, people in Buzimba village told me. We thus need to reach beyond the constraining ethnic lens to capture the sort of tensions and conflicts that ‘peace villages’ engender. In doing so, we find that these revolve squarely around land: conflict over double occupancy, forced clearances to enable villagization projects, and corrupt titling practices once the villages are in place.

Mutambara II village was constructed for returnees from Tanzania, with support from the Danish International Development Agency, DANIDA. It contains 258 identical two-room houses and is home to around 1,600 Burundians: 80 per cent returnees (Hutu) and 20 per cent vulnerable ‘residents’ (Tutsi and Twa).²⁶ The conflict within is quickly apparent, and it does not run across ethnic lines. The village was built on a previously inhabited site; some of those displaced by the village project refused to move, building small mud huts in front of the tin roofed DANIDA houses in protest, and to the great frustration of the houses’ inhabitants. Some of the mud huts are just a few feet away from the peace village houses, others are directly attached. Altogether, 25 houses were ‘affected’ in this way. As of April 2015, when I visited again, the problem remained unresolved. The occupation ‘is a form of protest’, explained a sympathetic resident from outside the village. There was a powerful discord at the basis of this conflict: while peace villagers campaigned to have the ‘residents’ removed, pooling financial resources to send ‘ambassadors’ to Bujumbura to lobby the authorities and claiming that the occupation was mere speculation in expectation of indemnity, the occupants themselves claimed they had bought the land legally, even if they had no titles to it.

This led to extremely strained relations. As one widow returnee confessed:

We are not even talking to each other... if I put my foot outside the house, they will take the earth [for poisoning me]. She is cooking in front of my door, if I would fetch some carbon, they would throw out the whole food, because

²⁶ All residents are essentially classed as vulnerable, victims of ‘disasters’ (*sinistrés*; see Falisse and Niyonkuru, 2015). In the case of the Hutu, these are landless returnees (‘without address’). The Tutsi and Twa chosen are also classed as ‘victims of disasters’, specifically internal displacement and landlessness (Sindayihebura, 2011).

they think they would get poisoned. I cannot do anything there [pointing to her small garden plot]. If I would grow a mandarin tree, they would destroy it. If I plant a renga renga, they take it out during the night. The only thing I own is the house and the path to the toilet. We submitted our case to the administration, they did nothing.

A young man, also a returnee spoke fearfully:

I got the house in 2011. Someone else used to live there, the occupier had cassava trees there, they are there until now.... We don't even talk to each other. If my child tries to touch anything in the garden, this can lead to problems. The resident said: between us, either he or me, one should die. He was planning to build another house annexed to mine, but I stopped him. He took a machete and was about to kill me but a neighbour intervened. The policeman took him to jail, he stayed there for a week and two days, then he was free. Until today, we live together and I don't know what will happen.

The situation in Mutambara is far from unique. Since the sites used for the construction of peace villages were hardly uninhabited, but rather 'used by locals' (Fransen and Kuschminder, 2014: 70), such land disputes are a common occurrence.

The *nyumbakumi* in Mutambara II summed it up thus:

The problem started with the project to build the village because the core issue is that there was a kind of traditional village here — 300 people were living here for so long that they thought [claimed] this is their land... So some have been living here for so long. Others bought land here because they heard about the village project and expected more money if they sold back the plot.

[Do other villages have the same problems?]

This is a problem across the whole country.

During my fieldwork I was able to observe another such dispute from its inception. A large piece of land just outside a village was allegedly burnt down by local authorities in order to push illegal occupants out — paradoxically, to clear the space for the Makonde peace village, another villagization project. While about 400 people lived in the affected area, I was told that only 50 people were given land in the planned

village. The new integrated village will be one of the latest phase of villages — open to all rural Burundians, but requiring investment, which most people cannot afford.

In this context, people directly question the notion of ‘peace’ evoked through the peace village label: ‘We are still in a warlike situation’, suggested a woman from the burnt area; ‘[on the night of the burning] they came with the military, supervised what was happening, it was 4am in the night. That is why I am saying we live in a warlike situation’. In contrast to an ethnic narrative of coexistence, those in and around the villages do not see the tensions as principally identity driven, but rather as contemporary and owing to the politics of land and corruption. To many people, the spatial reconfigurations and the perceived inequalities that result give the impression of ‘unequal citizenship’. ‘We are not Burundians like other Burundians’, complained a woman displaced from the future peace village site: ‘we realize we are not citizens like other citizens’. In consequence, she asked, ‘how can relations be good? You are being chased because of a returnee, you are expelled because your land can be given to a returnee [as part of the peace village scheme]’.

The inhabitants inside and outside of the peace village were quick to point out that the fault for these conflicts lies squarely with the government. ‘Authorities are antagonizing us against each other’, the displaced woman continued: ‘The problem before us — the authorities that should advocate for us, they are chasing us’. Another woman from within the peace village echoed the idea: ‘We ourselves would like to live in harmony, but these authorities are antagonizing us’. The *nyumbakumi* also agreed: ‘We don’t have any problems between us, but the government is dividing us, the government gives us the lands that belong to residents and they [then] come to attack us’. ‘The issue is the government’s fault’, was the resolute conclusion of a woman with an occupant living on her plot: ‘the government is not addressing the problem it caused itself’.

The corruption of local administrators adds another layer to the conflict, as many houses in peace villages such as Mutambara I and Buzimba were illegally transferred to ‘residents’ who paid bribes, rather than originally chosen beneficiaries. In some cases such as Buzimba, the ownership was successfully restored to the rightful owners. The composition of Mutambara I, on the other hand, spoke of a continuing

problem — of the 300 houses, less than 100 belonged to returnees, allegedly because authorities allocated houses to those willing to pay. A further complication is unequal access to titles.²⁷ In Mutambara II, title deeds were pending on all houses with occupants, but there was also a divide between returnees and residents. Most of the former got attestations from the donors that the house and parcel had been given to them (allegedly because this was sponsored by the UNHCR), while most of the latter did not (allegedly because, in this case, the costs accrued to the government).

The villages have also created tension and conflict between villagers and the adjacent communities, since they are perceived as being islands of relative privilege, with infrastructure that wider communities do not have access to. ‘In the southern provinces, local communities often had no easy access to water and, when they saw the Peace Villages receiving taps and fountains, tensions arose and escalated to the level of sabotage’ (Falisse and Niyonkuru, 2015: 18). Tensions also arise around access to peace villages themselves. Just outside the peace village at Bukeye, Nyanza Lac, I spoke to a young returnee working outside under a UNHCR tarpaulin stretched overhead. Returned by force in 2012 from the Mtabila camp, he said ‘we cannot tell why some [returnees] are in peace villages and others are not’, since ‘we have documents, even until now [we have the same entitlement]’; he urged me to ‘take the message further to the decision makers, that some people are still sleeping under sheets.’

The villages are meant to be self-sufficient and integrated into the communities but in fact they foster separation in a number of ways. The design — straight rows of compact houses, identically built and with plaques marking their provenance — immediately sets them apart both from the typical dispersed settlements and from Burundian villages and towns. The intention was to combine returnees and vulnerable populations, but instead the villages create vulnerability, as plots are too small for subsistence and inhabitants complain of hunger. The frequent references in reports to

²⁷ Based on the 2011 Burundi land law, all owners can get land certificates/title deeds. This is a slow process, which takes longer than systematic land registration (Takeuchi, 2014). Prior to claiming a land title, however, the peace villagers have to obtain a declaration/attestation that the house and parcel were given to them, and by whom. The slow and uneven application of these procedures, even within the same spaces of a small peace village, exacerbates insecurities and social tensions.

‘ghettoes’ (Maniraguha, 2011) and a ‘camp atmosphere’ (Fransen and Kuschminder, 2014) suggest important limitations to the project of social integration and ‘coexistence’ aimed for by the peace village programme.

But interestingly, the government’s socio-spatial engineering creates uncanny separation and segregation even between peace village projects themselves.. Two peace villages — Gihungwe and Kagwema — were built right next to each other along the paved road (as all ‘integrated’ villages must be) leading from Bujumbura north to Cibitoke. They form a stretch of houses almost a kilometer long, visible from afar on what is otherwise a completely empty plane close to the DRC border. Although the villages are adjacent to one another, the difference in the quality of construction is striking.

Gihungwe houses Burundians removed from Cabiza in the Rukoko natural reserve close to the DRC border. Despite what the plaque at the entrance indicates, the inhabitants insist they are ‘not vulnerable’. They claim that they had access to livelihoods and lands in Cabiza, and question the government’s motives for their displacement. Though the houses are, by the people’s own assessment, an upgrade from their previous dwellings, they are certainly the lowest quality of all the villages I visited, made of mud and sticks. They contrast starkly with the neighbouring peace village of Kagwema which has 1,700 houses (only partially inhabited), all built according to specifications in the latest wave of villagization, using burnt bricks and corrugated iron roofs, and fitted with solar panels. This contrast is a further example of the peculiar logic of social integration and coexistence promoted in Burundi: while the design of the peace villages promotes token ‘ethnic integration’ within the village, it inadvertently creates socio-economic segregation more broadly.

There is a further paradox worth noting, namely that the villages are not only experiments in the placing of different social and ethnic groups together in one space, accommodating Hutu returnees ‘without address’ and other ‘vulnerable’ Burundians; they are also sites of exit and outmigration. Due to their failure to provide sustainable livelihoods, they have become unique sites of a different kind of ‘return’ — back to Tanzania. The narrative of the good life in Tanzania recurred frequently in my interviews, emphasizing the feeling of neglect and grievance vis-à-vis the government

of Burundi. Some villagers said they felt betrayed, having been promised much by the government to entice them to return, and finding too little when they came back.

‘Many people are going back’, confirmed a returnee in Nyanza Lac. In Mutambara, Buzimba, Busebwa villages and beyond, all spoke of aspiring to, hoping for or actually planning to return. ‘Now we are thinking of returning to Tanzania’, an elderly returnee told me; ‘if I could get tickets [for my family], I would go there immediately’. Besides the issue of open conflict over physical space (land and titles), and tensions arising from spatial visibility and contrast (separation, segregation and perceived inequalities), there is also the issue of ‘failed promises’ and hopes that accompanies the lack of economic viability in spaces of return such as this. The outmigration of former refugees is an additional indication of how well-meaning peace village schemes unsettle rather than settle.

Thus, in a perverse dynamic, villages created to address ethnic division and to integrate ethnicities end up creating grievances that supersede ethnicity and are directed at the peacemaker (the state). Does this signal a form of ‘success’ of these schemes — that conflicts over issues such as land or lack of voice supersede ethnicity, and that people across ethnicities are now ‘unified’ in their dissatisfaction with the state? This can hardly be considered a positive development in a state unwilling to channel these grievances, contributing to them instead. The recent violent events are a powerful show of this — the opposition in the streets cut across ethnic lines, but the government’s repressive strategy and unwillingness to negotiate and create a space of inclusive dialogue has exacerbated the conflict and escalated the violence. Ethnicity has indeed been displaced as a dominant frame for understanding Burundi’s conflict, and the state’s schemes such as the peace villages merely reflect the disconnect of the government with this reality.

To conclude, the lens of dynamic, relative and reflexive space have much to teach us about post-war planning and its unique (onto)politics. The sites we have considered layer movement upon movement, creating tension as some people are pushed out, while others are accommodated. Even for the returnees, the spaces are in many senses unsettling and the narratives of yet another move back to exile attest to this powerfully. Importantly, the struggles over the meaning of the space also have to be

placed within the wider context of people's orientations — the comparisons and compensations that people draw between very concrete placement alternatives: the ancestral lands they cannot trace, the space of the exile, or the latest phase of integrated villages, too expensive to move to. It is through such diachronic attention to layering and the synchronic framework of orientation, that a people-centred perspective on the contestation over peace village space emerges. The struggle here is not only rooted in concrete physical spaces, but reaches to reflexive space that 'defines' what peace villages represent. As my fieldwork has shown, people question the very assumptions underlying the project: that 'peace' has been established in their everyday lives, or that 'ethnicity' rather than politics might be a key driver of conflict.

COMING TOGETHER, COMING APART? CO-OPTING THE COEXISTENCE NARRATIVE

While the first section looked at the problematic, narrow conception of 'coexistence', the following section looks more squarely at resistances to being (dis)placed. It considers the diverse forms of placement executed in the name of the 'coexistence' narrative, looking at former IDP sites, land-sharing arrangements on the hills, as well as villagisation and the ways in which people contest such placement both in physical and reflexive space. The section demonstrates the ways in which people on the ground — and across ethnicities — co-opt and manipulate the official narrative to fit their own objectives., often in order to refuse or resist the very (dis)placement the government is promoting, thus throwing into questioning the characterization and legitimacy of the post-war order.

There are at least three different ways in which people strategically use the coexistence narrative: 1) to resist removal/dispersal from sites; 2) to entrench a particular position in land conflict, namely the right to stay; and 3) as a general protective or strategic measure, since this is a key government discourse. As previously mentioned, the narrative of 'coexistence' underlines much of the post-war spatial re-engineering. It underpins dispersal from mono-ethnic IDP sites (mostly inhabited by Tutsi), the idea of the peace village, and even the notions of land-sharing

among occupants and those who have come back to claim their land. Coexistence is thus both ideological and politicized and as such has to be handled carefully by people and is often tacitly affirmed.

The most obvious show of people's strategizing is when it comes to managing me as the researcher: the topic is either skirted or quickly addressed by a hasty and eager insistence on good coexistence. '[Inter-ethnic] coexistence is good,' quickly affirm people everywhere from hills to villages, 'we are sharing, peacefully living together.' 'Turabana neza cyane' — we coexist very nicely, — says an old woman (referring to ethnic groups) on Cirisha hill in Bujumbura rural. 'Babanye neza' — people coexist well, — confirms a young Hutu boy in Rushubi. 'Neza vraiment!' — [the relations are] really good! — insists an old Tutsi man in the same vicinity. 'Ego- Yes, now we are together, Hutu, Tutsi, Twa,' affirms a Twa man on a hill close by. 'Now we don't have problems between Hutu, Tutsi, Twa, it is over', suggests a Hutu primary school teacher, before launching into a long discussion of political issues that do continue to divide. Across Burundi, people keep highlighting that rather than ethnicity, what matters most is political discord at elite level, land conflict, and poverty.

The coexistence discourse is one that many are careful to reproduce, even as we walk through a concentrated Twa settlement in Bujumbura rural, or a former IDP site housing mostly Tutsi. This is the politically safe response, which then allows my interlocutors to get to issues that are of more pressing importance to them. The interviewee sees me as a rare opportunity to get key points across, typically related to material assistance or resolution of conflict to their advantage. The repeatedly urge me to 'raise voice' on these issues. However, as my fieldwork also reveals, the coexistence narrative is not only a safety net or a quick nod, something to be hastily affirmed, showing its delicate nature. The discourse is also more actively manipulated by people in their own interest. It is used to counter the state's attempts at placement and displacement, using the government's own rhetoric to contest and undermine its actions. Through the playful deployment of coexistence narratives, people reveal the tensions and problems they still see with coexistence. At the IDP sites, people both uphold the rhetoric of inter-ethnic coexistence as an ideal to aspire to and question its viability in spaces of return on the hills. They stake a right to particular spaces, qualifying *where* coexistence should happen.

‘We help each other in everything’, says an old returnee on Murirwe hill, echoing a wider sentiment in the vicinity. But people acknowledge that ‘there are areas where things are not like this’. In Bujumbura rural, people note ‘the missing populations’, the Tutsi who have not moved back, putting a dent in the coexistence narrative. ‘Tutsi come and work on their lands’, observes a Twa man, ‘we share a bottle, they share beer with us, but the Tutsi are not back yet. They have not [re]built houses here. [Why?] This is the question, it is difficult, they are just not there, have not returned, they are still on the sites’. An old Hutu woman on an adjacent hill confirms this:

Some are still in IDP camps, but now they come regularly, we stay together in the day, the only problem, they refuse to return so that we might live together again.

[Have none of them returned?]

None of them, they spend the day, even cook here, but then they go.

[Why?]

We don’t know... We don’t know because we don’t see any reason... and we are not happy about this because we are asking ourselves what is the reason behind this?

The former IDP sites provide clear examples of this strategic use of the coexistence narrative. According to the IDMC, in 2015 around 77,600 Burundians were living in ‘protracted displacement’ (a label many would dispute) in 120 sites across the country, concentrated mostly in central and northern Burundi (IDMC, 2015). Many sites linger to this day — mostly housing Tutsi who fled the 1993 killings — although the government is actively trying to close them down, at times forcibly. The official reasons given for the closures are the post-conflict need for return and integration, the temporary nature and unofficial status of the sites and the undesirability of ‘mono-ethnic’ communities. Populations at Bugendana, Ryanyoni, Mutaho, Kibimba, Gitega and Ruhororo sites, among others, all face pressure to disperse. This is another paradox of post-war placement: displaced communities are resisting ‘return’ ‘home’ to their hills of origin by staying put, citing ongoing insecurity, unresolved grievances and their distrust of the possibility of peaceful coexistence in their rural homes. They have also established a new community that offers comfort and a new home. Their

ontopolitics again consists of contestations in both physical and reflexive space, as people question the key assumptions underlying the dispersal policy.

Once again, this paradox can best be understood through the concept of people's orientations and compensations among concrete placement alternatives. If the returnees are leaving again, the IDPs refuse to return, citing fear of coexisting with others on their hills. 'During the day, we go and work on our lands', explained a woman at the Mworu Ngundu site, 'but we are afraid, we cannot spend the night'. This refrain was repeated at the different sites. While relations on the hills are improving, people tell me, the coexistence is partial: it works on the surface and during the day, not in the night and not in the heart. The nearby integrated villages (also called peace villages) are too expensive to be a viable option for most.

Many people use the government's own rhetoric in their attempts to entrench their position and undermine attempts at removal, to bolster their aim to stay put. They claim that they are 'already mixing' — Hutu now live on the sites, either because of intermarriage or business, and they welcome others. They are not opposed to coexistence, and suggest there is no need for them to be moved to a peace village if they can create one right there, on the site. An old woman at the Mworu Ngundu site gave me a 'message': 'Our wish is that the top leaders should give us peace, and we should stay in this village... Even others [other ethnic groups] are coming to live with us, all ethnic groups are represented here'. A woman leader at the same site emphasized that:

The community is mixed, even Hutu, even Batwa are over there... Since the land belongs to the government, we said since we are already mixed, we should stay here, and other communities could come to the site... Since you [the government] are building peace villages over there [points across the road] you should just extend it to here, since we cannot afford going to the peace village... and then we can live in harmony, a Hutu would come and establish a house here...

When I pressed her on exact composition of the site, she admitted there were currently only three families with Hutu men who had married Tutsi women on the site. The Batwa 'live in the village, or just by the village... just out of the village, but we visit each other'.

The area of central Burundi around the city of Gitega housed numerous IDP sites dating back to the beginning of the civil war in the early 1990s. A key example here is Bugendana, but many other sites manifest similar dynamics. Bugendana is unique because a massacre happened on the site itself in 1996, purportedly perpetrated by the then-rebels and today's dominant party CNDD-FDD. The site surrounds the memorial and burial place of the 670 victims. Bugendana site is hence a powerful *lieu de memoire* (literally, a place infused with memory, and a severely traumatic one) and one that the government is allegedly trying to erase from the map. The government claims the site needs to be cleared for an airport to be built in this area. A local administrator confirmed this to me, suggesting it was not 'an issue' since it is 'permitted to move cemeteries'. To the government, this site is particularly inconvenient, commemorating as it does the involvement of those in power in a violent past. More broadly, all lingering IDP sites are considered a symbol of separation and of ongoing tensions, whereas the government wants people to mix and coexist as the post-conflict and peace narrative demands.

I visited Bugendana to talk to people about transitional justice but soon realized that what they wanted to impress most on me was their categorical refusal to move away from the site, back to the hills from which they had come two decades earlier. They did not believe their security would be guaranteed on the hills. The anxiety was palpable, and the past very much alive. This was compounded by the government's pressure to disperse Bugendana's inhabitants, either back home or to the nearby Makaba villagization site which was visible in the distance but too expensive for most. The people often spoke of being neglected and abandoned by the very state so invested in their removal. In this case, the perspective of layering is again key: movement was to be layered upon movement in order to erase politically-sensitive memory, and to create tokens of change and politically useful images of transition, coexistence and peace.

Even here, however, a talkative man disputed labels and played with the coexistence narrative:

They should not call us IDPs, we are just a population like the others... It is a way of discriminating you [to label and hence target for a particular policy —

return]. Because even them, the others (*abandi*)... the Bahutu, even they are poor... They are saying that we are only one ethnic group [living here], but some are coming here, we are not closing off anyone, we would like to live together.

Another young woman underlined this: 'We want to stay here because we have been staying here for long... It's a village ['peace village'], there are Hutu, there are Tutsi, there are Batwa, we are mixed. It's a village like the others'.

Such narratives play with the power of framing. The inhabitants are appropriating the government's own language and criteria to redefine the site as a desirable and acceptable settlement. Rather than living dispersed back in the hills, why not espouse the spirit of villagization and turn the dense settlement into a 'peace village'? A young man in his 20s at the Ryanyoni IDP site expressed just this idea: 'Our wish is this: we would like to stay here... Even those living in the hills, if they are supportive of the village project [villagization], they should come here, we would like to live with everybody, but here'.

These narratives were deployed as legitimizing techniques, but often proved insufficient in the face of physical action to remove. While similar stories to that of Bugendana were repeated in a number of other IDP sites, their destinies were different and the varied forms of resistances employed spoke of a repertoire that reaches beyond manipulation of narratives. There were fears of forced dispersal at the Ruhororo IDP site in the north of Burundi where tensions between displacees and local inhabitants escalated into violence. The government denied the rumours and instead uses more subtle forms of encouragement (the returnees should serve as 'examples'). The Ryanyoni site that I visited close to the central city of Gitega was to be forcibly dismantled, but inhabitants mounted resistance in 2012: the military and police that came to expel them was prevented from entering by young men lying on the road and blocking entry with stones. 'They tried to force us to leave', an old woman explained, 'but the youth decided they would sacrifice themselves... we won't leave.'. 'We were fighting them', two young boys told me proudly as we walked down the asphalt road, 'we said if they come again they will leave only with one eye [they will throw stones].'.

Blocking the infrastructure of access is a common tool in the repertoire of contention in rural areas. Such actions symbolically express the limits of trust and tolerance, and of state power in enacting integration. The lingering sites are monuments to the limits of the Burundian state in its respacing-for-peace strategies and they undermine the notion of Burundi ‘at peace’. But there are other examples of the ways in which the discourse of coexistence is deployed in rural areas to assert a particular position in conflict — this time land conflict — and to stay put. After the war, more than half a million Hutu returnees (Rema Ministries, 2012: 19) came back to Burundi; many found their ancestral lands occupied and had to strike land-sharing agreements with the residents as an interim measure. The temporary solution has turned into a new status quo; and recently it was shown just how explosive any change to the arrangement can become. Shortly before the 2015 elections, in a politically motivated move, the new head of the national land commission (CNTB), Serapion Bambonanire, decided in favour of returnees in multiple land cases, awarding the land in full to them, thus directly dismantling the ‘sharing’ approach. This change of direction was a culmination of a longer-term trend, but did not prove successful or long-lasting.²⁸ Relations in communities deteriorated, and ‘residents’ began to resist their eviction; in at least two locations in Makamba (Mugogoma hill and Ruhimba hill) they armed themselves, blocked roads and threatened the police and the CNTB staff who came to execute the decision. The situation became a ‘quasi insurrection’. As a result, the work and decisions of the CNTB were provisionally suspended in March 2015 for the duration of the electoral period ‘to avoid bloodshed’²⁹ and an impasse over the issue ensued.

²⁸ The sudden change in policy needs to be carefully placed into the context of political competition ahead of the 2015 elections and the personality of the new CNTB head. The Office of the President has taken CNTB under its purview in 2010 and appointed Bambonanire as the new President in 2011. Since then, the CNTB has been accused of being politicized and of increasingly favouring the Hutu claimants (i.e. the returnees, those benefitting from the change of course) in a bid to boost the government’s main support base. Importantly, the 2015 shift in policy has not become in any sense a ‘default’ position. It led to powerful resistance by the ‘residents’ in the affected areas, demonstrating quite powerfully that the status quo of ‘sharing’ has been promoted not only ‘from the top’, but in fact ‘from below’ as well by one side to the land conflict.

²⁹ In the words of the Governor of Makamba province, quoted in <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20150322-conflits-fonciers-burundi-decisions-cntb-suspendues-pierre-nkurunziza-presidentielle-3e-mandat>

In my research in Kibago (Makamba), and Buheka and Kabondo (Nyanza Lac), I found that the residents blamed the CNTB for their situation: ‘the very body meant to resolve disputes’, they said, ‘is destroying “our peace”’. They argued that people coexisted nicely (referring to land sharing) and should continue to do so. They were using the language of peace and coexistence to resist their own removal from their lands, to paper over the fact that the status quo of ‘coexistence’ is in fact a dormant, unresolved conflict. On the other side of that conflict, a returnee outside Rumonge explained: ‘The government says “you should share”.... But we are not happy with this decision, we just need to obey it’. This sense of a compromise rather than a solution was echoed much more widely by returnees. ‘We were not received properly’, suggested another returnee in Kibago, ‘even if we accepted [to share], it was just a compromise’. ‘We agreed to share half and half’, said another returnee, drawing a line in the dusty earth down the middle of a square representing the plot, ‘but in reality we only had small, inferior parts’.³⁰

The framework of ontopolitics again proves key to our understanding of interactions with post-war planning. It draws our attention to the contestations that emerge in both physical and reflexive space over the very terms of (dis)placement and the post-war order. And again, the tensions and conflicts that emerge cannot be understood without the historical layering of placement and displacement, or people’s orientations and compensations among concrete placement alternatives. Both on the IDP sites and in scattered rural settlements, people manipulate the coexistence narrative to their own advantage, and often against spatial reconfigurations imposed upon them. The narrative of ‘coexistence’ is used to legitimize a particular status quo, and not only by the government. Naturally, however, narratives are often not enough, and represent only one tool in a wider repertoire of contention.

MEMORY AND THE DEVELOPMENTAL BUILD-UP: CLEARANCE, REMOVAL AND THE FAILURES TO FILL SPACE

³⁰ The ‘fair deal’ issues are corroborated by Rema Ministries (2012: 27).

This final section looks at (dis)placement in the name of socio-economic development; this is a more physical/infrastructural type of integration but one that is nonetheless meant to contribute to peace building and social stability. Again, what is of interest is the ‘social production’ of such respacing. Does infrastructural integration in the form of new roads, new urban spaces and the ambitious project of ‘integrated rural villages’ (VRIs) produce the desired social integration? Is there a darker social ‘underside’ to such seemingly beneficent physical planning? To understand and uncover the more subtle ontopolitics at play here, layering and orientation are again important. With regards to layering, all of these projects do in fact require and enact their own displacements. The layering is starkly literal here, as the new post-war build-up requires removal of layers of remains, or the repositioning of bodies. The concept of orientation is also key, this time to understand the symbolic and social impact of being suspended among very concrete alternatives of placement.

This section therefore examines two contested spaces that have escaped academic attention thus far. First, I consider the latest phase of integrated villages, which targets all rural inhabitants and promotes concentrated settlement over dispersed rural dwelling that characterises the Burundi landscape. Second, I look at the displacement of war-time human remains due to infrastructural projects, specifically construction of roads and new urban quarters. I investigate what these encounters reveal about state–society relations and the threads of (dis)trust that bind people to the state in imagination and in practice. The paradoxes here revolve around contested absences rather than presence, and foreground the socially disintegrating dynamics that underlie such integration attempts. The first paradox concerns the careless removal of remains and displacement of memory to give way to brand new materiality such as roads and living quarters. The second paradox derives from the government’s inability to fill the brand new build-up, specifically the latest wave of integrated villages, which remain for the most part uninhabited.

The absences in both cases speak of distrust and the problematic concept and execution of integration. Compensation comes in quite literally here: people do not question the benefits of integration that a new road offers, but question the lack of compensation for its cost — the proper and careful placement of remains and thus memory. Similarly, people do not question the desirability of greater integration in

terms of social services, but do not see a realistic compensation for leaving their lands, either because of costs or corruption, or fundamental distrust related to the state-promoted alternative. In the best-case scenario, this sort of integration fails to resolve tensions that lie (sometimes literally) just underneath the new surfaces; in the worst case, it exacerbates them. In short, such new materiality of integration does not necessarily promote peace: there is no attempt to resolve, acknowledge and address its costs, and its key terms and motives are often distrusted and disputed.

In Burundi, forced (displacement) after war has not only occurred in the name of coexistence but also development, and often both justifications are given. On the Bugendana former IDP site, for example, inhabitants were not only encouraged to ‘return’ ‘home’ to their hills because this would break ethnic segregation and fit within the framework of ‘peace’; they were also told the site needed to be cleared for the construction of an airport. During my follow-up visit in 2015, there were no tangible signs of airport planning, but the anxiety and distrust that the rumours had triggered were still alive among the inhabitants. People referred to a recent meeting of the ruling party CNDD-FDD at which the airport had been mentioned as a promise to supporters ahead of the elections, but they were sceptical about the development promise. ‘Until now, the current President, it is he who wants to kick us from here, pretending he is bringing development, but he is not looking for an airport, he is looking for us’, an old man told me: ‘This idea of an airport is a pretext, malevolence, it is a trick’. Two young men claimed that in private, communal council members admit there is no plan for an airport, but that there are other private projects planned for the area. In fact, they admit that development might not be the real reason for clearing the site: ‘Some within the officials, some who will talk to you privately, they would say “to be honest, we want you to leave this site because of these massacres, it is a kind of memory, we want these massacres to be forgotten”’. Development in this case is believed to harness political support and to underwrite the politically profitable clearance of memory.

However, it is not only current inhabitants that are to be cleared from sites in the name of development, but also human remains. In Kivyuka, Western Burundi, a new road has cut through mass graves: the space concerned is the site of the Kivyuka massacre perpetrated by the military in May 1996, during the civil war. The massacre

on the marketplace claimed 350 lives and was a punishment for the rebels' repeated destruction of electricity towers in the area. In 2013, when financial resources allowed for the construction of a road, part of the mass grave was exhumed and remains hastily stored. The construction company Sogea-Satom allegedly wanted to dispose of the remains 'along with the dust'; the next idea was to bury them in the cemetery, but the local associations of victims protested. The remains were then placed in a wooden box and to date they remain locked in a storage room of the secondary school, in the hope that a proper memorial will be constructed in the future.

This rather brutal treatment of the remains provoked a local outcry. Though done in the name of development (a local activist in the victims association admitted that 'the road is necessary because the area is isolated'), the families of victims felt profoundly disappointed with the act at multiple levels, citing '*mefiance*' (distrust) of the government. After all, the people buried here were 'martyrs of the CNDD-FDD', the rebel group turned dominant party, who died in response to the rebels' actions during the civil war. Now, paradoxically they were suffering further, symbolic, violence, at the hands of the very actors that were meant to symbolize change.

A comparable case occurred on Izege hill in Gitega, where the hillside is being transformed into a new neighbourhood. In the process, human remains were unearthed and left lying amid the rubble. Many of the remains were anonymous, dating to executions during the civil war perpetrated at the local military station. In contrast to Kivyuka, however, there was no association here to protect the remains. 'They are no longer there', a young man on top of the hill informed us, 'some were thrown away, others washed away by rain... I was trying to take a picture with my smartphone, but I was prevented from doing so. The authorities don't want us to talk about it'. With no official map of mass graves and no policy on memorialization of such remains, the outrage has not thus far translated into concrete remedies. In these cases then, we see a forced and undignified removal of memory by its de-linking from place, paradoxically in the name of linkage and integration. Integrating and disintegrating dynamics interlace.

If roads and urbanization create displacements in the name of access and order, the latest wave of villagization requires such displacements in the name of integration,

concentration and ‘freeing up of arable lands’. These ‘integrated’ and ‘modern’ villages are to be constructed with durable materials, giving a ‘more decent life’ (*une vie plus decente*) to the rural inhabitants (*Panapress*, 2011). The villages are built on state land and the beneficiaries receive free iron sheets and solar panels once they construct their house. They are often labelled as ‘peace villages’ since ‘they are constructed in the same spirit because they have to include all ethnic groups’.³¹

Yet despite the incentives offered to scattered rural dwellers, the villages remains largely empty. The resistances to integration here are implicit, signaled by the emptiness and the transgressive decay of the brand new.. Some of the villages, such as Makaba or Gishubi in Central Burundi, are already three or four years old and yet almost completely empty; the houses are overgrown with grass, some structures began to crumble. The decay clashes with the veneer of the ‘fresh,’ brand new build-up, the image of villages as signposts to modernity. Their supposed durability clashes with their apparent impermanence.

As we walk through the rows of houses at Makaba site close to Bugendana, the wild grasses stand taller than us and make it hard to wade through the tiny paths. Most houses are built and have roofs, but there are no floors and no cement to hold the structure together, no windows or doorframes. Some owners bricked up the windows, or closed them with sheets, but the wind gets in nonetheless, weakening the structure; some of the walls start falling apart, exposing wooden roof beams. In most of the village, the only sound is that of the wind. The chatter of children leaving the nearby primary school soon disappears: none of them comes to the village, instead they take the road below, by the pineapple plantation, to take them to their homes.

Why do the villages fail to populate? First, the VRI houses are too expensive for most, and even those who take credit might struggle to pay it off, delaying the house’s completion. Second, people prefer to stay closer to their lands. ‘*Dukunda kurima*’ — we are cultivators (lit. ‘we love to cultivate’), explained a woman in Gishubi. Others treat them as subsidized investment, to be sold, rented out, or simply left to decay if means and opportunities do not allow. At Makaba, a security guard told us that many

³¹ Interview with the Permanent Secretary, Ministry for Communal Development, Bujumbura, 10 April 2015.

owners prefer to stay along the road in the town of Bugendana, ‘doing business’, and rent these houses out. He himself would like to move in, but the investment is prohibitive. In a powerful paradox, only the administrators, teachers and businessmen live on the Makaba site, administering an eerie ghost town, a monument to the limits of state-led spatial reconfigurations executed in the name of integration.

Villagization has been tried elsewhere in Africa, on a massive scale — most recently in Rwanda after the genocide (see van Leeuwen, 2001) and previously in Mozambique, Tanzania and Ethiopia (Hilhorst and van Leeuwen, 2000). Overall, it has acquired a rather negative record and has been considered a development ‘failure’. Why then deploy it with such verve in Burundi? The main reason seems to be that such projects create political utility. First, they provide concrete images of progress and modernity that have appeal, and can translate into political credit. At Gishubi in 2015 we come upon an immense ‘peace village’ (the latest VRI phase) divided into six quarters and containing 520 houses, all spread around the main road winding slightly uphill towards the communal headquarters. Most of the houses were empty, some starting to fall apart. But from the communal offices on top of the hill, the image was one of perfect order and gleaming iron roofs.

Second, the projects serve to build political constituencies. They are supported by President Nkurunziza himself, both financially and through his presence. The President comes to hand out the iron sheets and even helps in the construction of houses. The VRI project at Gishubi commenced in 2011 and was inaugurated by the President who laid the first brick in 2012. The massive project was undertaken to mark the 50th celebration of independence of Burundi: at the time, it was the largest VRI project in Burundi and it has won an accolade as such. The communal administrator showed us the merit certificate with pride, signed by the President. ‘I also won a flight to South Korea’, he added, ‘to strengthen capacity in villagization projects’.

The not-yet fulfilled development promises, such as the threat of the airport, are as haunting (Navarro-Yashin, 2012) as the fulfilled promises — the eerie places of emptiness and fresh decay, in a land that is overpopulated and in economic crisis. The ontopolitical tensions surrounding development, space and mobility are not

straightforward, however. While at Bugendana, people question the very terms and motives of the development text, in the other sites a more mixed picture emerges. The road in Kivyuka is both welcome and damaging; disintegrative dynamics join integration. Gishubi and Makaba might be both desired and unattainable. The ontopolitics that underlies the two cases of absence is also slightly different: while both projects are about physical and social integration, the removal of remains is an unquestioned cost of that integration, while the absence of people in large villages made specially for them is an unsettling result.

Overall, and importantly, offering this sort of attention to space — to its filling, or conversely, the inability to fill it, its unfulfillment (in all senses of the word) — allows us to read for the same dynamics discussed in previous sections, albeit from a different angle. Again, we see that integration enacted here is not wholly beneficent but can create social tension- — in the first case because of its suppression of memory of a violent past and its undignified treatment of the remnants of that past, which directly precludes peace and stability; in the second case because segments of the intended beneficiaries of the new village schemes clearly sense their inability to access the ‘modernity’ of these sites, betraying a yet different sort of limit to integration.

CONCLUSIONS: AN UNSETTLING PEACE

This article has taken a dynamic look at the production of post-conflict space through struggles over ‘settling’ — struggles both over ideas about what such space constitutes and over production of physical spaces themselves. The tropes of integration and coexistence have animated a score of post-war planning programmes in Burundi — spearheaded by the government but supported financially and logistically by donors — which aim to reconfigure both space and social relations in the hope of consolidating peace. People in rural areas challenge the post-conflict placement physically and discursively, manipulating its very terms to assert their position, albeit not always successfully. In the process, they question the peace transition in multiple ways.

The case of Burundi shows that the idea of ‘mobilities’ — more broadly understood not only as coming and going, but also as being stuck, refusing to move or aspiring to leave again — can help us to understand so-called ‘peace governance’, the politics of coming together after conflict and the politics of social ordering by the government in the name of peace. The concrete spaces studied here cast light on the otherwise elusive state–citizen bond, in production and under negotiation. The study has shown that the ontopolitical frame, foregrounding people’s interaction with planning in both physical and reflexive space, allows us to unearth bigger questions of peace, transition and political trust.

What I called the paradoxes of mobility aspirations and practices — the internally displaced who refuse to go ‘home’ to their hills, the peace villages fostering conflict and being sites of exit and outmigration, the new villagisation sites gaping with emptiness-- all powerfully reflect on the context of political incorporation in Burundi, marked by distrust of the state, and its contested absences and presences. The paradoxes of course cease to be so once we begin to question notions such as transition and post-conflict. Indeed, the people of Burundi themselves fundamentally question the notion of peace, and much before the election-related crisis. Already in 2013 my interviewees spoke of ‘small peace’ (*agahengwe* or surface-level) or continuing war,. Importantly, the reconfigurations of space were seen to play a part themselves , in the sense that they have contributed to , or proved impotent to prevent, the very things they hoped to address— conflict, tensions and segregation.

Nevertheless, paradoxes still abound in the new spaces, and they are no less unsettling. People resort to using the government’s own rhetoric of integration to subvert its actions. They defend their stay in spaces marked by heavy histories — camps or unofficial sites created by former governments in the midst of war. The transiency of these sites and their infusion with painful memories do not preclude them from being narrated as ‘homes’, while assumed homes of the past, invoked in government rhetoric, are either unrecoverable or have become transient sites themselves for periodic visits. If the government does contribute to the diffusion of inter-ethnic tension, it does so inadvertently, by authoring new conflicts which cross-cut ethnic cleavages. The project of integration backfires and is contorted in unexpected ways.

Although rescaling after war has been about change and experimentation, people's reactions to it, more specifically the orientations vis-à-vis being moved and placed, speak of powerful continuities. The Arusha Peace Agreement of 2000 heralded a profound political shift — a power-sharing agreement which changed the historical ethnic composition of government and offered a careful ethnic balancing of power. Despite this landmark change, local political reflections revolve around continuity — in insecurity, impunity, lack of progress in justice and accountability, in the way that power is experienced in 'new' spaces. Staying put in former sites at all costs is a way of questioning the security on the hills, the unresolved past of conflict, and the viability or desirability of reintegration in 'home communities'. Outmigration back to Tanzania casts doubt on the ability of the post-war dispensation to deliver economic security. Conflict over land in peace villages and outside of them, or the inability to attract people into the villages, attest to the limitations of the post-war coexistence and integration narratives.

The government's socio-spatial experiments can thus unsettle relations even as they settle and order people in space; disintegrating dynamics go hand-in-hand with integration. Ultimately, the conceptions of coexistence and integration that drive spatial reconfigurations are superficial, papering over rather than resolving grievances, and creating new ones in the process. They also cover up the political utility of projects such as these, which help to reproduce the current political regime. On a broader level, the findings of this study are a warning that we should not only focus on conflict-affected countries at moments of open conflagration. Rather, we should investigate much deeper dynamics at the local level that speak powerfully of grievances of a more structural kind, from which neither the state, nor development, nor even peace building, can be excised.

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